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‘Just another border incident’: The Rann of Kutch and the 1965

India-Pakistan War

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‘Just another border incident’: The Rann of Kutch and the 1965

India-Pakistan War

The India-Pakistan War of September 1965 has attracted little attention in the larger body of work on South Asia. Further, almost nothing has been written on the earlier skirmish, in April 1965, between Indian and Pakistani security forces in the *Rann-of-Kutch*, an uninhabited salt marsh. This article argues that the limited conflict in the *Rann*, its immediate consequences, and its impact on Pakistani military and civilian leaders were central to Pakistan’s consideration of a military solution to the on-going dispute in Kashmir, which then led to Indian retaliation and the outbreak of war.

Keywords: Rann of Kutch; India & Pakistan; Harold Wilson; Lyndon Johnson; Ayub Khan

On 10 April 1965, intelligence officials in the British High Commission in New Delhi learnt that Indian security forces had killed 25 Pakistani Rangers the day before. The Pakistani Rangers is a paramilitary force that guards its side of the India-Pakistan International Border (IB).¹ The ‘action’, an intelligence signal made clear, took place in the *Rann-of-Kutch*, an uninhabited salt marsh located between the Indian state of Gujarat and the Pakistani province of Sindh.² The ‘Rann’ is derived from the *Sanskrit* word *irina*, or salt waste.³ In a note written in July 1948, Pakistan claimed that the northern part of the *Rann* belonged to it. ‘The boundary in question’, the government of the new Pakistani state argued, ‘is still in dispute.’⁴ India refuted this claim. The

¹ Note: The IB divides India and Pakistan. The demarcation was completed in August 1947 and was formerly known as the Radcliffe Line. The IB is not the same as the Line of Control that divides Indian and Pakistani-administered Kashmir.

² [Austin, United States of America, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library; hereafter LBJPL], National Security Files [hereafter NSF], Box 129, Vol. 12:64-6:65, Embassy in Bombay to Dean Rusk, Bombay, 10 Apr. 1965.

³ [New Delhi, National Archives; hereafter NA] Ministry of External Affairs papers [Hereafter MEA], File Number: P V 152 (12)/1965, ‘Dispute raised by Pakistan regarding the Kutch-Sind Boundary’.

⁴ [NA] MEA, ‘T’ Branch, File Number 9/12/65-T, ‘Exchange of notes between India and Pakistan’, Pakistani High Commissioner in India to the Secretary, MEA, New Delhi, 14 Jul. 1948.

location of the boundary in the *Rann*, Indian officials responded, ‘has never been [in] any dispute.’⁵

Confident that this was nothing more than a skirmish, Indian military and intelligence sources described the exchange of fire in the *Rann* in early April as ‘just another border incident’.⁶ Their demeanour, according to British and American officials was ‘fairly relaxed’.⁷ In a matter of days, by 24 April, the Indian Chief of Army Staff would refer to these incidents as a ‘crisis’. The ‘active front’, he argued, was ‘now 30 miles in length’.⁸ The rapid scale of escalation made the headlines in London, New Delhi, and Karachi.

The Times, in London, argued that India and Pakistan were engaged in a ‘limited border war’.⁹ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the enigmatic young Pakistani Foreign Minister told Indian audiences in Calcutta – on his way to Jakarta from Karachi – that ‘it was for the first time this conflict [between India and Pakistan in Kutch] has reached such a magnitude.’ The *Dawn*, in Pakistan, carried the quote on its front page.¹⁰ Indian papers were filled with stories of how Pakistani infantry brigades, ‘backed by tanks and artillery’, occupied five miles of Indian Territory south of what India considered to be the border in the *Rann*.¹¹ That this was no longer ‘just another border incident’ became rapidly clear to those concerned across the world.

⁵ [NA] MEA, ‘T’ Branch, File Number 9/12/65-T, ‘Exchange of notes between India and Pakistan’, Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan to the Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations (MFA), Karachi, 10 Aug. 1949.

⁶ [LBJPL] NSF, Box 129, Vol. 12:64-6:65, Embassy in Bombay to Dean Rusk, Bombay, 10 Apr. 1965. Also see: Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 304

⁷ [LBJPL] NSF, Box 129, Vol. 12:64-6:65, Embassy in Bombay to Dean Rusk, Bombay, 10 Apr. 1965.

⁸ [LBJPL] NSF, Box 129, Vol. 12:64-6:65. Chester Bowles to Dean Rusk, New Delhi, 24 Apr. 1965.

⁹ ‘India puts its border casualties at 65’, *The Times*, 27 April 1965.

¹⁰ ‘No talks under shadow of bayonets’, *Dawn*, 17 April 1965.

¹¹ ‘Massive attack by Pak army repulsed in Kutch’, *Times of India*, 24 April 1965.

Further, that the Pakistani military was better equipped to fight a limited war in the *Rann* became equally clear to civilian leaders and the Indian military. By the third week of April 1965, the Indian ambassador in Washington – B. K. Nehru – met regularly with Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State. Nehru's aim in these meetings was to convince the Americans to pressure Pakistani President Ayub Khan to cease firing in the *Rann*. As Nehru argued - if pushed, India would have no choice but to open a part of the front that it dominated. This, he warned, 'means escalation and we don't want that'.¹² The administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, focussed then on the crisis in Vietnam, was able to offer little more than sternly worded suggestions that both sides agree to a ceasefire. Indian and Pakistani criticisms of American policies in Vietnam had made both countries unpopular in the U.S. Congress. For his part, Johnson was unwilling to go the extra mile in a part of the world that was relatively less important at the time.¹³

Concerned that continued escalation might lead to a general war, and aware that the Johnson administration was less likely to intervene in the on-going crisis in South Asia, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson offered to play the role of peacemaker. On 30 June 1965, Wilson's efforts fructified in a ceasefire agreement signed between India and Pakistan. Article I of the agreement stated that 'there shall be an immediate ceasefire with effect from 0300 hours GMT' on 1 July 1965. This was, according to the Acting British High Commissioner to Pakistan, meant to mark

¹² [LBJPL] NSF, Box 129, Vol. 12:64-6:65, Rusk to Bowles, 27 Apr. 1965.

¹³ For a background, see: Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2001), 153-158, and Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War in the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 305-336

‘the end of a dangerous chapter in Indo-Pakistan relations’. Equally, he stressed, it was supposed to open ‘an opportunity for a better stage in Indo-Pakistan relations’.¹⁴

Yet, the opportunity for peace quickly vanished. In September 1965, India and Pakistan went to war. The breakout of hostilities was prompted by a Pakistani attempt to instigate rebellion in Indian-administered Kashmir, or the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).¹⁵ This time, Wilson chose not to intervene. The United Nations (UN), and finally the Soviet Union, occupied the space Britain had temporarily monopolised in the summer of 1965 - that of a peace broker. The question of what precisely happened between 30 June 1965, when a ceasefire agreement on the *Rann* was signed, and the beginning of September 1965, when war broke out, remains under-researched. Equally, the specific causes of the war in September 1965 are only partially analysed.

This article makes two sets of contributions. First, it provides a detailed account of both the longer historical dispute over the *Rann*, as well as the limited border war between India and Pakistan in April 1965. Most accounts of the 1965 India-Pakistan War (that broke out in September of that year) pay little attention to the conflict in the *Rann*.¹⁶ This article aims to fill this gap. Apart from British and American sources, it uses hitherto untapped archival records from India. Second, and relatedly, it makes the argument that Ayub’s decision to initiate a rebellion in J&K in August 1965, which led to Indian retaliation in September 1965 and the outbreak of war, was prompted by his belief that British and American involvement would limit

¹⁴ [Kew, United Kingdom; hereafter TNA] DO 196/369, ‘Pakistan: The Rann of Kutch Dispute’, Acting British High Commissioner in Pakistan to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations’, 3 Aug. 1965.

¹⁵ Note: That Pakistan instigated rebellion in August 1965 is well documented, including in Pakistani sources. See: Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan’s First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1993), 312-319

¹⁶ Note: The fullest account of the clashes in the Rann can be found in Farooq Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965* (London: Hurst and Co., 2013), 65-95.

escalation. Wilson's personal commitment to peace during and after the skirmish in the *Rann* shaped Ayub's advance. These perceptions, as misplaced as they may have turned out to be, was, as this article argues, as much of a reason for the outbreak of war as those offered by scholars in existing works. To be sure, this article by no means dismisses existing analyses with regard to the causes of War in 1965 – discussed below - but instead adds to such analyses using a wider range of sources, including recently declassified reports and correspondences available in India.

The article is divided into four parts. The first briefly outlines the existing analyses on the causes of war in 1965. The second provides a short historical note on the dispute in the *Rann*. The third re-traces the set of events between January 1965, when Indian and Pakistani forces first clashed in the *Rann*, and August 1965, when Pakistani regulars disguised as *mujahideen* fighters infiltrated J&K. In doing so, it underlines the role played by Harold Wilson, and Britain more broadly, throughout this period. The fourth, and concluding section, assesses the immediate and long-term consequences of Britain and America's retreat from South Asia during the time of the War in September 1965.

Existing Analyses

Three sets of inter-related reasons are said to have led to the outbreak of war in September 1965. First, India's poor showing in the *Rann*, authors argue, convinced some Pakistani leaders – most importantly, Bhutto – that the Indian political and military classes were still demoralised following their defeat at the hands of China in 1962. India, according to these Pakistani leaders, had not recovered from what was nothing short of a humiliating reversal against the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Bhutto and a group of younger generals, argues the scholar Shuja Nawaz, understood

this to be the right time to ‘resolve the Kashmir dispute through military means’.¹⁷ The fact that India’s forces in the *Rann* were often found retreating, leaving behind their arms and ammunition, was telling, observed Pakistani leaders.¹⁸ According to one of the finest accounts of the war, by the solicitor-turned-writer Farooq Bajwa, in September 1965, ‘the real significance’ of the clashes in the *Rann* was that, for the first time since 1948, Pakistan ‘had real confidence in its military strength’.¹⁹ Further, as Altaf Gauhar, Ayub Khan’s confidante and Information Secretary in 1965, makes clear, following the confrontation in the *Rann*, Ayub openly embraced the somewhat incipient belief that ‘the Hindu [read: India] has no fight in him’.²⁰ In short, hubris and a one-sided view of Pakistan’s military abilities led its leaders to experiment with adventurism, eventually leading to the outbreak of war.

Second, Pakistani leaders’ confidence in wresting the whole of Kashmir from India was also shaped by their perceptions of what they believed to be a tipping point in J&K. The military confrontation in the *Rann* coincided with mass unrest in J&K. A relic believed to be a strand of hair belonging to the Prophet Muhammad was stolen from a shrine in Srinagar in 1963. Although this was mysteriously returned a year later, it brought tens of thousands of people onto the streets of J&K.²¹ Local Kashmiris believed that this was, somehow, a conspiracy on the part of the Indian government to delegitimise Kashmiri identity. Further, a series of legislative measures were adopted in the Indian parliament to more tightly integrate J&K with the Indian

¹⁷ Shuja Nawaz, *Crosses Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200-201.

¹⁸ ‘Four Indian soldiers die, 35 captured’, *Dawn*, 11 April 1965.

¹⁹ Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent*, 75.

²⁰ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 270. Also see: Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insiders Account of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2015), 410-411.

²¹ For a brief background, see: Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2014), 118-121.

Union, much to the chagrin of Kashmiris.²² Viewing these events from across the border, Pakistan, argues the Kashmir expert Navnita Behera, ‘concluded that it had widespread popular support in the Valley,’ in J&K.²³

It convinced Ayub and others in Pakistan that a degree of assistance on their part would lead to rebellion in J&K.²⁴ The timing was moot; by 1965, Ayub’s government managed to ‘subordinate’ *Azad* Kashmir, or Pakistani-administered Kashmir,²⁵ and now looked to integrate the whole of the former princely state with Pakistan. In August 1965, Pakistani regulars and propagandists, disguised as *mujahideen* fighters, were meant to achieve exactly this. As Chester Bowles, the then U.S. ambassador to India recounts, Pakistani leaders ‘decided that the time had come to bring military pressure directly to bear on India and to settle by force the differences [over Kashmir] which had defied negotiation’.²⁶

Third, and lastly, scholars make the case that the decision in 1965 to seize J&K using military means was shaped by the view in Pakistan that the Indian military was still a match for the Pakistani armed forces. This advantage, according to some Pakistani generals, would be short-lived. Aware of the rapid pace of India’s armament program following the defeat in 1962, ‘Pakistan,’ as Stephen Cohen put it, ‘initiated the 1965 War with India’.²⁷ ‘A “now or never” mentality,’ as another scholar

²² A short and engaging account can be found in: T. C. A. Raghavan, *The people next door: The curious history of India’s relations with Pakistan* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2017), 75-79.

²³ Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 76-80.

²⁴ For a brief account of how Pakistan read the crisis in Indian-administered Kashmir, see: Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2009), 172-179

²⁵ For an excellent note, see: Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History* (London: Hurst, 2012), 89-99.

²⁶ Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 501-503.

²⁷ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (California: Univ. Of California, 1984), 139.

suggests, ‘gripped the decision-makers in Rawalpindi’.²⁸ The ‘window of opportunity’ was said to be ‘narrowing with India’s growing military strength’. The bottom-line, as scholars point out, was that ‘Pakistan was running out of time if it wanted to affect a military induced solution to the Kashmir imbroglio’.²⁹

That the so-called window of opportunity was, in fact, closing is borne out by statistical data. Whilst Pakistan’s military expenditure between 1960 and 1965 increased by approximately \$400 million, India increased its spending to more than \$2 billion. Between 1963 and 1965, the two years that witnessed an increase in arms sales in South Asia, India outspent Pakistan – in terms of expenditure on arms imports – by nearly \$300 million.³⁰ Further, and as one of India’s only defence economists argues, humiliation in 1962 gave rise to a ‘new defence consciousness in the country’. It led to the commissioning of the first Five-Year Defence Plan (1964-1969),³¹ with an initial demand to almost triple the defence budget.³² None of this eluded Ayub Khan.³³

Yet, as this article argues, these reasons alone are not sufficient to explain the outbreak of the War. A key variable, as far as Ayub and others in his Cabinet were concerned, had to do with the likely potential for external intervention. Escalation

²⁸ Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31. Also see: Husain Haqqani, *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), 110-111.

²⁹ Nawaz, *Crossed Swords*, 20-23.

³⁰ Saadet Deger and Somnath Sen, ‘Military Security and the Economy: Defence Expenditure in India and Pakistan’ in Keith Hartley and Todd Sandler (eds) *The Economics of Defence Spending: An International Survey* (London: Routledge, 1990), 197-8. Note: These figures are calculated according to 1980 currency exchange rates.

³¹ Deba Mohanty, *Arming the Indian Arsenal: Challenges and Policy Options* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2009), 84-5.

³² Note: The five-year plan initially demanded 5.9% of India’s GNP, see: *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume XXV, ‘Memorandum for Record between Robert McNamara and Chester Bowles’, 31 March, 1964, 73.

³³ Stephen Cohen, ‘US Weapons and South Asia: a Policy Analysis’, *Pacific Affairs* 49/1 (Spring, 1976), 49-69.

management, they believed, was highly likely because Britain, and perhaps even the United States, would dissuade India from going to war. Pakistan's experience during and immediately after the conflict in the *Rann-of- Kutch* suggested the same. That this was not to be the case was as shocking to Ayub as it was to the leaders of the Soviet Union, who ultimately stepped in to negotiate peace in South Asia.

The Dispute in the Rann: A History

On 11 April 1965, the Indian Permanent Representative to the UN argued that 'Pakistan[i] armed personnel made illegal intrusions into the area south of the boundary between Kutch and Sind' in the *Rann*.³⁴ As far as the Indian government was concerned, 'no authoritative map showed [*sic*] the Rann, or any part of it, as part of Sind'.³⁵ The first set of serious armed contacts between Indian and Pakistani security forces had taken place less than forty-eight hours before. Clearly, India wanted a quick diplomatic solution. Taking the issue to the UN was meant to pressure Pakistani leaders to enter into dialogue and find a diplomatic resolution. A week later, on 18 April, the Pakistani representative to the UN argued that his country had merely taken 'defensive measures' following India's 'systematic attempts to hinder Pakistan border patrols' in the northern part of the *Rann*. He did not fail to add that the northern part of the *Rann* 'had always been part of Sindh'.³⁶

The total area under dispute was about 3500 square miles. India claimed the whole of the *Rann* up to the northern shoreline, whilst Pakistan claimed the area until the twenty-fourth parallel, a few miles south of India's claim line. As the

³⁴ [TNA] DO 196/360, Permanent Representative of India to the President of the UN Security Council, New York, 11 April 1965.

³⁵ [NA] MEA, File Number: P V 152 (12), 1965, 'Dispute raised by Pakistan regarding the Kutch-Sind Boundary'.

³⁶ [TNA] DO 196/360, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the President of the UN Security Council, New York, 18 Apr. 1965.

Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) in London confessed to Michael Stewart, the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the dispute was hard to understand. Indeed, understanding each party's position would require an assessment of disputes going back to the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Further, this was hardly a strategic piece of ground for either India or Pakistan. The *Rann* was (and continues to be) a barren strip of land at the seaward end of the boundaries between what was then West Pakistan and India. For some part of the year, it is a desert, and at others, because of the monsoon, it turns into a marshy swamp.³⁸ In the time of Alexander (325 BC), it would have been a navigable lake.³⁹

Pakistan's claim dates back to 1762, when the ruler of Sind, Ghulam Shah Kalhora, invaded the whole of the *Rann*. It established, Pakistan argued, the juridical boundaries of Sind that remained in the post-1947 or the post-independence period. However, and as both Pakistani and Indian interlocutors agreed during an exchange of notes in 1960, Kalhora's son, Sarfraz Khan, recalled his fathers troops as early as 1772. This ended, according to historical records, any permanent presence of Sindi rulers in the *Rann*.⁴⁰ Following several rounds of talks and exchange of notes between Indian and Pakistani officials (in 1948, 1956, 1958, and 1959), Kalhora's decade-long invasion became Pakistan's primary rationale for its claim on the *Rann*.

According to Indian records, the territory was the 'defined' but 'undemarcated' border between the former princely states of Sind (that continued to be called Sindh in post-independence Pakistan) and Cutch (in the state of Gujarat in post-independence India). The boundary, according to Indian diplomats, was defined on a

³⁷ [TNA] DO 196/360, 'Brief prepared for the Secretary of State's meeting with the President of India, 15 Apr. 1965.

³⁸ [TNA] DO 196/369, Acting British High Commissioner in India to the CRO, 19 Jul. 1962.

³⁹ [NA] MEA, File No. 9/12/65-T, 'Pakistani Note', 1 January 1960 in 'Notes exchanged between the Government of India and Pakistan regarding the boundary between Kutch (Bombay) and Sind (West Pakistan) Volume II'.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

map following two sets of trigonometrical surveys held in 1881-1882 and 1883-1884.⁴¹ It was yet to be demarcated on the ground with clearly defined pillars separating Indian and Pakistani territory. British diplomats in 1965 freely admitted that 'Britain did not get around to demarcating the greater part of the boundary between Kutch and Sind before relinquishing the Raj'.⁴² This was relayed to the Pakistani side in 1960 during the last meaningful meeting (in Lahore) between Indian and Pakistani representatives.⁴³

India argued that 'vague claims based on past history of relations between Kutch and Sind rulers were settled in an agreement signed in 1914'.⁴⁴ Accordingly, Survey of India maps between 1937 and 1942 showed that the *Rann* fell well within the West India States Agency that merged three princely states, including Kutch, all of which belonged to India in the post-1947 period. Lastly, India pointed out that in 1943, the Chief Secretary of Sind agreed to a map that depicted the whole of the *Rann* belonging to the state of Kutch.⁴⁵

In sum, India's claim rested on the argument that the borders between Kutch and Sind had not been contested for more than three quarters of a century during the time of British India, and until the Pakistani protest note of July 1948. Further, a more exact position of the border was established in multiple sets of exchanges and maps (most notably in 1913-14) till Indian independence.⁴⁶ On the face of it, and as the

⁴¹ [NA] MEA Papers, No. 62 (1) P/48-1893, Note, High Commission of Pakistan in India to the Secretary, MEA, 14 Jul. 1948.

⁴² [TNA] DO 196/369 John Freeman to the CRO, 30 Jul. 1965.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ [NA] MEA, File No. 9/12/65-T, 'Indian Note', 8 January 1960 in 'Notes exchanged between the Government of India and Pakistan regarding the boundary between Kutch (Bombay) and Sind (West Pakistan) Volume II'.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For a detailed account, see: 'The Indo-Pakistani-Western Boundary (The Rann of Kutch) between India and Pakistan', 19 February 1968, Volume XVII, United Nations, available at: http://legal.un.org/riaa/cases/vol_XVII/1-576.pdf. An abridged note can be found at:

tribunal that heard the arbitration proceedings following the clashes in the *Rann* in 1965 made clear, both sides had relevant arguments. However, in the end, the tribunal awarded only 350 miles of the disputed territory to Pakistan.⁴⁷

Legal positions aside, Pakistan's claim at the time of the clashes in early 1965 had to do with jurisdiction. It made the case that the northern part of the *Rann* had been administered by it since August 1947, and by the state of Sindh before then.⁴⁸ The point about jurisdiction was key. In January 1965, when Indian patrols came across Pakistani police forces in the *Rann*, the Pakistani government argued that its security personnel had patrolled the area for many years. There was a customary boundary, Pakistani officials argued, that India had trespassed. In turn, these officials stated that the 'intensive Indian patrolling' in the area prompted Pakistan to react.⁴⁹ The clashes in April that year, according to Ayub's government, were a defensive action against an offensive neighbour.

From Kutch to War

Context

On 25 January 1965, an Indian Platoon Commander at Karimshahi, in the *Rann of Kutch*, recorded tracks made by Pakistani military vehicles 1.5 miles inside India's claim line. This was, according to Indian intelligence inputs, the first serious sign of Pakistani encroachments in the region. By 10 February, Indian police patrols found the Kanjarkot Fort occupied by Pakistani Rangers. The vehicle tracks, argued these

'India and Pakistan: Award in Rann of Kutch Arbitration', *International Legal Material* Vol. 7 No. 3 (May 1968) 633-705

⁴⁷ Farzana Khan, 'The Rann of Kutch Award', *Pakistan Horizon* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Second Quarter, 1968), 123-127.

⁴⁸ [NA] MEA, File No. 9/12/65-T, 'Pakistani Note', 1 January 1960 in 'Notes exchanged between the Government of India and Pakistan regarding the boundary between Kutch (Bombay) and Sind (West Pakistan) Volume II'.

⁴⁹ [NA] Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the President of the UN Security Council, New York, 18 Apr. 1965

Rangers, were the de facto borderline between the northern and southern parts of the *Rann*.⁵⁰ According to Indian maps, Kanjarkot was 1370 meters south of the border with Pakistan.⁵¹ In a meeting between local commanders, both sides claimed the Fort. For its part, Pakistan argued that its forces had patrolled the area since 1947. They occupied the whole of the Fort on 3 March 1965.⁵²

The atmosphere in New Delhi, at the time, was calm. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was un-phased by the rising tension in the *Rann*.⁵³ He and his government were far more concerned about the uprising in Kashmir. As B. K. Nehru, his envoy in Washington, made clear to the U.S. State Department, the ‘fragility of [the] situation in Kashmir’ was alarming. This could, he argued, become India’s Vietnam. Nehru was referring to the attempts made by the Indian state to integrate J&K more firmly into the Indian Union and the violent reactions to the same on the streets of Kashmir.⁵⁴

By the middle of March 1965, notwithstanding the top Indian leaders’ indifference to the reports of Pakistani encroachments in the *Rann*, British officials in New Delhi grew concerned. There had been no major incident in the *Rann* since the winter of 1962. They sought-out Indian maps on the *Rann* and tried to assess for themselves the validity of both sides’ arguments.⁵⁵ They were also in touch with their counterparts in Karachi. British officials in Pakistan had long been concerned about

⁵⁰ [NA] MEA, PAK-I, File No. P1/108/146/65, ‘Kutch Aggression’ May to July 1965.

⁵¹ S. N. Prasad and U. P. Thapliyal (Ed.), *The India-Pakistan War of 1965: A History* (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2011), 20.

⁵² [TNA] DO 196/369, ‘Pakistan: The Rann of Kutch Dispute’, Acting British High Commissioner in Pakistan to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations’, 3 Aug 1965.

⁵³ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Shastri to Johnson, 11 Feb. 1965.

⁵⁴ NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Rusk to Karachi, 18 Dec. 1965.

⁵⁵ [TNA] DO 196/360, D. A. Scott to CRO, New Delhi, 9 Mar. 1965.

Pakistani adventurism and senior leaders' – such as Bhutto – desire to stroke the fires of revolution in J&K.⁵⁶ Their concerns were not unfounded.

Brigadier Riaz Hussain, the Director of the Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), was convinced that this was the right time to strike in J&K. He found unlikely allies in Bhutto and Aziz Ahmed, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary. The one person who remained unconvinced was Ayub. Testing India's resolve in the *Rann* was one thing, a war for Kashmir was altogether another.⁵⁷ Further, Ayub was more concerned about the upcoming elections in Pakistan in the third week of March (which he won), and visits to Beijing (2-9 March) and Moscow (3-10 April). He was equally concerned about the reactions to these visits in both London and Washington. In Beijing, Ayub signed a boundary protocol with Zhou En Lai to demarcate the border between Pakistan's Northern Areas and Tibet. In Moscow, he learnt that a scheduled visit to the U.S. had been cancelled by the Johnson administration. Unknown to him at the time, a visit by Shastri had been cancelled, too. Indian and Pakistani criticism of U.S. policies in Vietnam was the primary reason for the cancellations.⁵⁸

On 5 April, whilst still in Moscow, Ayub was told that Indian troops had moved to an area known as Ding, in what Pakistan believed to be in its part of the *Rann*.⁵⁹ India had, by the beginning of March, also set-up the Sardar and Vigokot Posts. These were rudimentary forward operating bases. Tactical fire fighting commenced in the second week of April and finally, on 9 April, Pakistani forces

⁵⁶ [TNA] DO 196/369, 'India: The Rann of Kutch Dispute', British High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations', 30 Jul. 1965.

⁵⁷ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 265-270.

⁵⁸ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Rusk to Karachi, 14 Dec. 1965.

⁵⁹ For a background, see: Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 291-303 & 80-89; and Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent*, 69-73

attacked and overwhelmed the Indian police posts.⁶⁰ Indian personnel temporarily withdrew from their posts. Whilst the Sardar post was re-occupied by the Indian army twenty-fours later,⁶¹ the Pakistani colonels and generals in Rawalpindi made much about the fact that Indian soldiers and officers took 'to their heels at first contact with the Pakistani forces'. The Indian forces' retreat validated the view held by many in Pakistan that India no longer had the stomach for a fight.⁶² Stories of India's hasty retreat made headlines in major Pakistani papers.⁶³ British officials in Karachi were equally taken-aback by India's poor military performance in the *Rann*.⁶⁴

Pakistan's new found confidence prompted General Musa Khan, the Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, to order an entire Infantry Division to move closer to the Kutch border.⁶⁵ By 17 April, orders were given to clear all Indian posts within Pakistan's claim lines. According to Indian military officials, on 24 April, four major Indian posts (Sardar, Vigokot, Biar Bet, and Chhad Bet) had come under attack.⁶⁶ A Pakistani brigade (of 3500 soldiers), supported by tanks, occupied a fifty-mile stretch inside India's claim line.⁶⁷ Musa Khan, according to Indian sources, placed his forces on alert for general mobilisation. Two Brigades were moved to Sind to support the activities of the Pakistani 8 Division already in the *Rann*.⁶⁸

The Pakistani attacks from 17 April unnerved both military and civilian leaders in New Delhi. Indian Chief of Army Staff, J. N. Chaudhuri, told Chester

⁶⁰ [TNA] DO 196/369, 'India: The Rann of Kutch Dispute', British High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations', 30 July 1965.

⁶¹ 'Indian troops re-occupy Sardar post', *Times of India*, 11 April 1965.

⁶² Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 307-310.

⁶³ 'Four Indian soldiers die', *Dawn*, 11 April 1965.

⁶⁴ [TNA] DO 196/360, Morris James to CRO, Karachi, 12 April 1965.

⁶⁵ For an operational level history told from both Indian and Pakistani perspectives, see: Prasad and Thapliyal (Ed.), *The India-Pakistan War of 1965*, 16-36 and Shaukat Riza, *The Pakistan Army: War of 1965* (Dehra Dun: Natraj Publishers, 1977), 77-98.

⁶⁶ [TNA] DO 196/369, 'India: The Rann of Kutch Dispute', British High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations', 30 July 1965.

⁶⁷ [TNA] DO 196/360, New Delhi to CRO, 25 Apr 1965.

⁶⁸ Prasad and Thapliyal (Ed.), *The India-Pakistan War of 1965*, 34-36.

Bowles, the U.S. ambassador to India, that he was 'faced with a crisis'. The reality of Pakistani Chaffee tanks descending on the feebly defended Indian positions in the northern part of the *Rann* had got the better of India's senior-most army officer. India had no armour in the area. Chaudhuri asked for U.S. political intervention, especially, as he forcibly argued, since Pakistan was using American military equipment that was to be reserved for self-defence, or to fight the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Further, Chaudhuri made it clear that India had found itself in an unenviable position in the *Rann*. American involvement, he argued, was crucial for 'restraining escalation'.⁷⁰

Similarly, L. K. Jha, the Indian Foreign Secretary, placed the onus of 'restraint' on the U.S. During a meeting with Bowles on 24 April, he underlined that U.S.-made tanks were being used by Pakistan to continue their attacks on Indian posts. Jha went on to state that continued attacks could force India to 'retaliate elsewhere', where 'conditions [were] more favourable to Indian forces'. This was, as far as Bowles was concerned, the first serious sign that the skirmish in a salt marsh could quickly develop into a general war.⁷¹ Yet, U.S. officials in Washington were unwilling to intervene directly. Bowles was told to stand down by his State Department.⁷² British officials in Washington argued that the cancellation of the Shastri and Ayub visits, coupled with Johnson's lukewarm attitude towards South Asia, 'put the Americans out of court with both sides'.⁷³ As Ayub had predicted, at least one of two of Pakistan's long-time friends in the West would ultimately take charge and help broker a peace agreement. The U.S. had played this role during and

⁶⁹ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65 [Telegram I], Bowles to Rusk, 24 Apr. 1965.

⁷⁰ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65 [Telegram II], Bowles to Rusk, 24 Apr. 1965.

⁷¹ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65 [Telegram III], Bowles to Rusk, 24 Apr. 1965.

⁷² [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Philips Talbot to Bowles, 27 Apr. 1965.

⁷³ [TNA] DO 196/360, British Embassy in Washington to FO, 27 Apr. 1965.

after the Sino-Indian War in 1962. This time, Britain stepped in to engineer what was supposed to be a lasting ceasefire.

A Ceasefire and the Promise of External Intervention

On 26 April 1965, the Commonwealth Relations Office instructed John Freeman, the British High Commissioner in India, and Morrice James, the British High Commissioner in Pakistan, to seek interviews with Shastri in New Delhi, and Ayub in Karachi. Harold Wilson had taken the firm decision to stabilise South Asia. The envoys were directed to ask the respective state leaders if a 'personal message from [the] prime minister would help to bring influence to bear'.⁷⁴ This was, as one of Wilson's biographers recollects, the prime minister's most important contribution to foreign affairs in his first administration (1964-1966).⁷⁵ The two leaders in South Asia readily accepted Britain's offer of its good offices to end the conflict.

To be sure, whilst Britain took the lead, American officials in Pakistan made sure to stay in close contact with Pakistani officials. After all, one of the key issues of the on-going conflict had to do with American-supplied equipment being used by Pakistan against India. With this in mind, Walter McNoughty, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, kept in regular contact with Aziz Ahmed. Ahmed 'did not specifically concede that American equipment was being used,' according to McNoughty, but 'said he presumed this was probably so'. He alerted the American ambassador to the fact that the Indian Air Force had undertaken reconnaissance flights over both, the disputed territory and further west in Sind.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ [TNA] DO 196/360, CRO to New Delhi and Karachi, 26 Apr 1965.

⁷⁵ Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 220.

⁷⁶ [TNA] PREM 13/390, Karachi to CRO, 25 Apr. 1965.

Whilst McNoughty made clear to Ahmed that a continued use of American equipment against India ‘might create problems over future supplies to Pakistan’, there is little evidence to suggest that, at the time, the U.S. was willing to threaten Pakistan with possible retributions for doing so.⁷⁷ Pakistan was an ally, and it was crucial to communicate the same to Ayub. That American equipment (most notably M48 tanks) was being used in Kutch was without doubt. Jha in New Delhi freely shared photos, taken by the reconnaissance flights Ahmed alluded to, with American officials.⁷⁸ Yet, for McNoughty, keeping Ayub on his side was equally important. No matter that the Johnson White House had little interest in the conflict, the U.S. ambassador did everything he could to make it clear to Ayub that America would remain invested in both, his government and South Asia more broadly. At one point, following Jha’s warning that India may retaliate elsewhere, McNoughty even mooted the idea that if this were to happen, the ‘U.S. would have no choice but to consider such [an] attack as unwarranted aggression for assistance to Pakistan under our commitments’.⁷⁹

By the end of April, and whilst British envoys in New Delhi and Karachi sought out an agreeable ceasefire proposal, Ayub seemed to have become more and more convinced that South Asia was too important for its fortunes to be left to the two warring parties. Wilson wrote to Ayub about the different ways in which de-escalation could take place. Impartial observers could be deployed according to the British prime minister.⁸⁰ Wilson’s Foreign Office suggested creating a

⁷⁷ [TNA] DO 196/300, Karachi to CRO, 25 Apr. 1965.

⁷⁸ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Bowles to Rusk, 27 Apr. 1965.

⁷⁹ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Rusk to Bowles, 3 May. 1965.

⁸⁰ [TNA] DO 196/361, Wilson to Ayub, 27 April 1965, DO 196/360 and D. L. Sykes to C. S. Pickard, 30 Apr. 1965.

‘Commonwealth Observer Group’.⁸¹ There was little more evidence Ayub would need that his western allies would indeed intervene in a military crisis with India⁸². Unlike Shastri, who remained more cautious about Britain’s role, Ayub had no hesitation in telling Wilson about the ‘fullest trust’ he had in Britain’s ‘sincerity and good faith’.⁸³

Further, Ayub wanted, and managed, to internationalise the dispute in the Kutch. On the other hand, Shastri’s India was caught on the back foot. As a post-mortem report on the crisis, authored by the British Foreign Office, noted, by the end of April ‘the Indian army was unable to contain Pakistan’s attack in Kutch’. Shastri had little choice but to agree to international intervention. The idea of retaliating elsewhere along the border with Pakistan could spark a war, and, as the report made clear, ‘Mr. Shastri and his Chief of Army Staff, General Chaudhuri, were under no illusions that this posed terrifying consequences for the sub-continent’.⁸⁴ On 30 April, an ‘informal ceasefire’ was announced for a period of seven days.⁸⁵ It was clear to both, journalists reporting on the war, as well as, British officials, that India’s poor military position had forced Shastri’s hand. Less than a week earlier, Indian officials brazenly claimed that accepting even a temporary ceasefire was difficult, as it would confirm that a dispute did, in fact, exist with regard to the borders in the *Rann*.⁸⁶ India’s position had, all along, been that the border merely needed to be demarcated, not re-defined.⁸⁷ By the end of April, Shastri switched positions and told the Indian parliament that:⁸⁸

⁸¹ [TNA] DO 196/361, D. L. Sykes to C. S. Pickard, 30 Apr. 1965.

⁸² Note: On Ayub’s more general thinking about the role of the U.S. and the U.K., see: Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 312-315.

⁸³ [TNA] DO 196/361, Ayub to Wilson, 30 Apr. 1965,

⁸⁴ [TNA] DO 196/369, ‘India: The Rann of Kutch Dispute’, British High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations’, 30 Jul. 1965.

⁸⁵ [TNA] DO 196/361, Ayub to Wilson, 30 Apr. 1965.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁸⁷ Note: The Indian protest note to the UN made clear that India was willing to organize a meeting between two survey generals with the view to demarcate an already defined border.

If Pakistan gives up its warlike activities I see no reason why the simple fact of determining what was the actual boundary between the erstwhile province of Sindh and [the] state of Kutch, and what is the boundary between India and Pakistan cannot be settled across the table.

Reaching a formal ceasefire agreement was made difficult for two reasons. First, India and Pakistan had divergent views on what the status quo actually meant, that is, the exact position their security forces would withdraw to following a ceasefire coming into effect. For India, it was the respective positions held by both their border security forces prior to 1 January 1960. For Pakistan, it meant the complete withdrawal of all forces from the entire disputed area in the *Rann*. As Jha told British interlocutors, this was ‘totally unacceptable’.⁸⁹ Further, India insisted that Pakistan vacate the Kanjarkot Fort as a pre-condition for a ceasefire.⁹⁰

Shastri had gone public with these pre-conditions.⁹¹ Indian opposition leaders – like Morarji Desai and Ram Manohar Lohia – challenged the government to ‘make a clear stand about Kanjarkot’.⁹² In Pakistan, news reports underlined both, the fact that the government did not desire or need to accept pre-conditions, and that Kanjarkot was ‘clearly’ in Pakistan.⁹³ No doubt, domestic pressures and public optics mattered, making a ceasefire agreement all the more difficult to complete. As Freeman argued, in a dispatch to the British Foreign Office, ‘I think Mr. Shastri

See: DO 196/360, Permanent Representative of India to the President of the UN Security Council, New York, 11 Apr. 1965.

⁸⁸ ‘Britain call for ceasefire in Rann of Kutch Dispute’, *The Times*, 28 April 1965.

⁸⁹ [TNA] DO 196/360, New Delhi to CRO, 25 Apr. 1965.

⁹⁰ Note: this was first made clear on 14 April. See: [TNA] DO 196/360, New Delhi to CRO, 14 Apr. 1965. Also see: [TNA] DO 196/361, Freeman to CRO, 30 Apr. 1965.

⁹¹ [TNA] DO 196/360, Freeman to CRO, 17 April 1965.

⁹² ‘Grave charges in border clash of India and Pakistan’, *The Times*, 14 April 1965.

⁹³ ‘Kanjarkot in Pakistan Territory’, *Dawn*, 15 April 1965, and ‘Delhi move to gain time for ran build-up’, *Dawn*, 21 April 1965.

would find it politically difficult to agree to a ceasefire publicly without a simultaneous agreement to resume the status-quo'.⁹⁴

Second, Ayub wanted the negotiations on the *Rann* to include discussions for a resolution to the dispute in Kashmir. Further, being aware that India may 'retaliate elsewhere', Aziz Ahmed and Bhutto proposed a general withdrawal of forces from all border areas, including J&K.⁹⁵ This was, needless to add, unacceptable to India. India went as far as rejecting the use of terms in a final agreement that could be loosely interpreted to open the door to negotiate the dispute on and around Kashmir. Expressions such as 'territorial dispute', 'arbitration', and 'arbitral tribunal' were rejected outright.⁹⁶

Finally, during a Commonwealth Conference of Prime Ministers, in the third week of June, the disagreements mentioned above were ironed-out by a determined British prime minister. Ayub agreed to Indian patrolling in Kanjarkot, although 'with great reluctance'.⁹⁷ He also agreed to the status quo date of 1 January 1965. In turn, Shastri accepted a set of ministerial meetings to resolve the differences in what he insisted on calling the 'frontier' in the *Rann*. The term 'disputed border' was avoided. India also conceded recourse to an international tribunal 'in the event of the likely failure to reach [an] agreement at the ministerial level'.⁹⁸ A draft agreement was accepted on 26 June,⁹⁹ and a final agreement was signed simultaneously in New Delhi and Karachi on 30 June. At 0530 hours (in West Pakistan) on 1 July, a formal

⁹⁴ [TNA] DO 196/361, Freeman to CRO, 30 Apr. 1965.

⁹⁵ [TNA] DO 196/369, 'India: The Rann of Kutch Dispute', British High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations', 30 Jul. 1965.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ [TNA] DO 196/367, CRO to Freeman, 26 Jun. 1965.

⁹⁸ [TNA] DO 196/366, Note, 'Brief discussion with President Ayub', 14 Jun. 1965.

⁹⁹ [TNA] DO 196/367, CRO to Freeman, 26 Jun, 1965,

ceasefire was in effect. On 2 July, Ayub publicly stated that he had ordered the withdrawal of Pakistani troops.¹⁰⁰

In India, opposition leaders lamented against the government for the ‘virtual surrender of our [India’s] national interest’.¹⁰¹ What did not help was Ayub’s public position towards the end of the negotiations. Aware that he and his armed forces had brought India to the negotiating table, the Pakistani President told audiences in Britain how he had spared an entire Indian Division in the *Rann*. The Indians, he argued, were found ‘squealing like they did after their conflict with China’.¹⁰² Statements such as these only added to the widely-held view amongst Pakistani generals and parts of the public that ‘a sense of dismay, despondency, and demoralisation ha[d] overtaken the people all over India’.¹⁰³ Central to this belief of Pakistani superiority was the view that the West, and most certainly Wilson’s Britain, would both manage and de-escalate crises in South Asia. As Gauhar writes, ‘Ayub was reasonably confident that the Rann of Kutch accord might serve as a model for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute’. Others in his inner coterie – like Aziz Ahmed – believed that if not Britain, then the possibility of Chinese intervention would deter Indian escalation in the future.¹⁰⁴ In the end, the likelihood of external intervention seemed to have been cemented in the minds of Pakistani leaders, both military and civilian. These perceptions shaped Pakistani adventurist policies in the weeks following the conclusion of the Kutch ceasefire agreement, leading, ultimately, to a war that, in fact, invited little interest on the part of either the U.K. or the U.S.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Armies get orders for pull back, says President’, *Dawn*, 2 July 1965.

¹⁰¹ ‘Sovereignty surrendered’, *Times of India*, 1 July 1965.

¹⁰² ‘War will hurt Delhi beyond repairs’, says Ayub, *Dawn*, 20 June 1965.

¹⁰³ ‘Demoralisation has overtaken people of India’, *Dawn*, 7 May 1965.

¹⁰⁴ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 311-319.

From Ceasefire to War

On 28 April 1965, as the seven-day informal ceasefire was being negotiated by British envoys in India and Pakistan, officers of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were tracking the 'heavy movement' of Indian army troops on the India-East Pakistan border. The possibility of a larger war remained high in the mind of these operatives. What worried them most was how India might react to both the conflict in the *Rann* and the rising tide of violence along the ceasefire line (CFL) that separated J&K from *Azad* Kashmir.¹⁰⁵ Other intelligence inputs suggested the probability of some form of Pakistani military action in J&K. 'The most dangerous element is advocacy in GOP [Government of Pakistan]', Dean Rusk concluded, 'of adoption [of] Algerian tactics, i.e., infiltration of irregulars across CFL to stir up violence of terrorism in Vale'.¹⁰⁶

In New Delhi, Bowles was clearly concerned. In a meeting with the Indian president – Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – the U.S. ambassador pressed the question of Kashmir. Bowles was impressed by Radhakrishnan's answer that 'in the right atmosphere' this, too, would be settled. These 'hopeful comments', Bowles realised were unfortunately detached from the 'realities of the current situation'.¹⁰⁷ Yet, he told both Rusk and his counterpart – Walter McConaughy – in Karachi that once the Kutch affair had been settled, India would be 'willing to embark on widespread negotiations with Paks'.¹⁰⁸ These conciliatory messages clearly had an effect on the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan. Ayub and McConaughy agreed about the 'dangerous

¹⁰⁵ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Appraisal, CIA 'Intelligence Information Cable', 28 Apr. 1965.

¹⁰⁶ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Rusk to Bowles, 1 Jun. 1965.

¹⁰⁷ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Bowles to Rusk, 27 Apr. 1965.

¹⁰⁸ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Bowles to Rusk, 23 May. 1965.

flammability' of the situation in Kashmir. They spoke of the 'senile and feeble' Commanding General of the UN Military Observer Group, and the need to move beyond the UN to solve the Kashmir dispute.¹⁰⁹

That these messages were to convince Ayub of taking limited and covert military action in J&K remained unclear to both British and American officials. By the beginning of July, plans to infiltrate disguised Pakistani soldiers into J&K were being discussed at the highest levels of the government in Karachi. Bhutto and Aziz Ahmed took the lead.¹¹⁰ As Ayub's own son writes, the success in the *Rann* 'encouraged the Pakistan government to revive international interest in the Kashmir dispute'.¹¹¹ Apart from McConaughy, who made clear to Ayub that the U.S. remained invested in the Kashmir dispute, British officials in Karachi wrote of how 'all India-Pakistan disputes can be settled through peaceful means'. The *Rann* accord, they argued, 'proved this'.¹¹² In fact, following the conclusion of the agreement in the *Rann*, Wilson told the House of Commons:

I hope that this may prove to be the first step towards a general improvement in relations between India and Pakistan, in whose welfare and peaceful progress all of us in Britain have so close and abiding an interest.

British and, to a limited degree, American intervention and counsel during and immediately after the signing of the Kutch ceasefire agreement, as Farooq Bajwa writes, 'helped convince' Ayub that 'India would succumb to military pressure from

¹⁰⁹ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 4, 12:64-6:65, Rawalpindi to Rusk, 11 Jun. 1965.

¹¹⁰ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 312-315.

¹¹¹ Khan, *Glimpses into the corridors of power*, 90.

¹¹² [TNA] DO 196/368, Karachi to CRO, 1 July 1965.

the West'.¹¹³ For their part, Indian diplomats around the world tried hard to convince their foreign counterparts that there was, in fact, 'little in common between Kashmir and Kutch'. Equally, they blamed the *BBC* for airing shows that suggested expanding the scope of the Kutch tribunal to include Kashmir. This was, they wrote, a move by 'Pakistani propagandists' that would seduce Pakistan to armed conflict with little hope of peace. The thinking, amongst the so-called propagandists, was straightforward. If international audiences and especially the Wilson government were so concerned about the dispute in a relatively minor salt marsh, then they would most certainly be invested and be willing to intervene in a conflict over the future of Kashmir.¹¹⁴ In fact, in his farewell note to the British Foreign Office, Paul Gore-Booth, the British High Commissioner in India, despairingly recounted:¹¹⁵

The Pakistanis began to feel that, internationally, things were moving in their favour and that Pakistan had only got to go on taking a tough line with India for them to get their way.

Gore-Booth maintained that Kutch had produced a new 'procedure for settling border disputes', which, he argued, 'cannot be stultified by Indian procrastination'. The outgoing High Commissioner was certain that the Kutch experience made Ayub believe that his allies, such as the U.K. and the U.S., would not abandon him or South Asia. In his meetings with the Pakistani Foreign Secretary, he supported Ayub and the

¹¹³ Bajwa, *From Kutch to Tashkent*, 95.

¹¹⁴ [NA] MEA, File Number WII/103(2)/65, Muni Lal (High Commission of India, Trinidad) to B. K. Sanyal (Director, Europe), 7 Jul. 1965.

¹¹⁵ [TNA] DO 196/369, E. L. Sykes to C. S. Pickard, 19 Jul. 1965.

British Foreign Office's position that any conflict over Kashmir could be managed using the Kutch model of third-party arbitration.¹¹⁶

On 24 July, Ayub's Cabinet confirmed a plan to use regular soldiers disguised as *mujahideen* fighters to infiltrate J&K, and spark a rebellion against India forces. It was code-named Operation Gibraltar. 3000 such soldiers had begun their training two months earlier, in May 1965.¹¹⁷

On 8 August 1965, Dean Rusk in Washington DC received formal reports from the Indian government that 'large-scale Pakistani infiltrations [were] under way in Kashmir'.¹¹⁸ Local units of the Indian army had been tipped-off about the infiltrators a few days before by local farmers and shepherds in J&K. The first armed contact began as early as 5 August. From the outset, Operation Gibraltar had been thwarted.¹¹⁹ Apart from the fact that the infiltrators were found to be uncoordinated and under-trained, there was no appetite in J&K for a rebellion. Pakistan had sent six 'raiding forces', each consisting of anything between two to five companies. Their main aim, as a British report for the Joint Intelligence Committee put it, 'included sabotages of bridges, disruption of lines of communication, and encouragement of the local population to a general uprising'.¹²⁰ Much to their surprise, local Kashmiris worked with the Indian armed forces in tracking down the majority of 'raiders' who had made it across the CFL.¹²¹ Documents captured by Indian forces proved

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* For a background, see: Paul Gore-Booth, *With great truth and respect* (London: Constable, 1974), 299-313, and McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*, 312-313.

¹¹⁷ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 5, 6:65-9:65, Bowles to Rusk, 14 Aug. 1965.

¹¹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, South Asia, Volume XXV, Rusk to Bowles, 8 August 1965, Document 164, Available at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25/ch1>.

¹¹⁹ [NA] Information and Broadcasting Ministry (hereafter I & B), File Number 9/1/65-KP, "Story of the First Encounter with Raiders in Poonch."

¹²⁰ [TNA] DEFE 44/102, 'The India-Pakistan War, 1965.

¹²¹ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 5, 6:65-9:65, Bowles to Rusk, 14 Aug. 1965.

conclusively that senior Pakistani Generals directed the infiltration. One such letter had been hand-signed by Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik, the General-Officer-Commanding of Pakistan's 12 Division. It outlined the routes for infiltration across the border.¹²²

The failure of Gibraltar prompted Ayub to authorise what came to be called Operation Grand Slam. On 1 September 1965, regular Pakistani units opened fire across the border in Kashmir. The objective was to capture Akhnur, thirty kilometres from Jammu in Indian-administered Kashmir. Doing so would cut off Indian forces from the rest of J&K.¹²³ Under pressure, and with the view to give India's 10th Mountain Division time to organise its forces against the Pakistani thrust around Akhnur, at 0530 hours on 6 September, the Indian Army crossed the International Border and attacked Pakistani Punjab. The conflict that Ayub had wanted to limit had escalated into a general war. Finally, on 23 September, a ceasefire came into effect at 0330 hours, Indian time.¹²⁴ Contrary to Ayub's estimation, neither the U.K. nor the U.S. stepped-in to manage the crisis, let alone support the so-called 'Kutch model'.

In fact, soon after Rusk heard of the Pakistani infiltration in the second week of August, the U.S. State Department told the embassy in Karachi that 'we have concluded we should concentrate for [the] moment on asking [the] U.K. to help us to get through to Ayub'.¹²⁵ The British position was even more curious. By early August, officials in London argued that Britain should no longer support the arbitration over the Kutch dispute, which continued despite Gibraltar and Grand Slam.

¹²² [New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library; hereafter NMML] Subject File 45, V. L. Pandit Papers. , Note to Vijayalakshmi Pandit (the senders name is left blank), 15 Sept. 1965.

¹²³ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 327.

¹²⁴ [TNA] DEFE 44/102, 'The India-Pakistan War, 1965.

¹²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, South Asia, Volume XXV, Rusk to Karachi, 10 August 1965, Document 167, Available at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25/ch1>.

‘The role of middleman’, one senior British officer stated, ‘is almost bound to become uncomfortable and unprofitable sooner or later’.¹²⁶ Following the second wave of infiltrations in late August, Bowles tried hard to persuade the State Department that ‘failure to call their [Pakistan’s] hand only encourages them to continue present actions’.¹²⁷ It had little effect on either Rusk or the White House.

Rather than intervene, Johnson’s fatigue with India and Pakistan began to show. Robert Komer, better known for his expertise on Vietnam, and who then served on Johnson’s National Security Council (NSC), advocated cutting-off military aid to both South Asian countries. Johnson approved the decision on 21 September. On that same day, the White House made its position clear: ‘The United States should support and encourage the United Nations’ efforts’. It underlined, in a note to the Chairman of the U.S. Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, that the White House would not choose sides in this war. It was the UN’s job to broker a ceasefire and bring peace to South Asia.¹²⁸ As for Wilson, he followed Johnson’s lead. His efforts now focussed on shaping America’s war in Vietnam. South Asia, as one of his biographers makes clear, no longer mattered.¹²⁹

Conclusion

For Jagat Mehta, the Indian Charge de Affaires in China, the date of 5 September 1965 was momentous. It was, as he would later write, a turning point in Sino-Pakistani relations. According to Mehta, on that day, China, and premier Zhou En Lai

¹²⁶ [TNA] DO 196/369, British High Commission in Karachi to CRO, 8 Aug. 1965.

¹²⁷ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 5, 6:65-9:65, Bowles to Rusk, 27 Aug. 1965.

¹²⁸ [LBJPL] NSF Country Files: India, Box 129, Vol. 5, 6:65-9:65, Horace Torbart (White House) to J. W. Fulbright, 21 Sept. 1965, Note: Whilst the formal order in the U.S. to stop arms shipments to India and Pakistan was taken on 21 September, effectively, this had ended a fortnight earlier on 9 September: [TNA] DEFE 44/102, ‘The India-Pakistan War, 1965.

¹²⁹ Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 388-395.

in particular, ‘abandoned’ the façade of neutrality in its relations with both India and Pakistan. China, finally, and at least rhetorically, made clear that it favoured Pakistan in any conflict with India. The decade-long efforts to strengthen the Sino-Pakistani partnership crystallised in 1965. On 5 September, Chinese government spokespersons openly stated that ‘there is no question of Pak infiltration and the armed conflict was entirely provoked by India’. Further, Chinese leaders argued that the violence in J&K was a natural result of a ‘National Liberation Struggle’ that had been ignored by the U.K. and the U.S. On 11 September, Chinese spokespersons underlined that the Kashmiris have the ‘right to self determination’.¹³⁰

These were, without doubt, statements designed to limit India’s escalatory aims on the battlefield. On 5 September, Indian army movements in Punjab were reported. On 6 September, the Indian army attacked Pakistani positions across the IB, towards Lahore. On 12, and then 16, September, China issued an ‘ultimatum’ demanding that India dismantle its military infrastructure in the east, along the Sikkim border with Tibet. This was, as British military intelligence officers concluded, a diversionary tactic designed to ‘warn’ Indians that the border in the east was as much a liability as that with Pakistan in the west. Three days later, a battalion of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) made incursions in Ladakh, south of India’s claim line with China.¹³¹ China, Mehta argued, was taking full advantage of the vacuum created by Britain and the U.S.’ virtual exit from South Asia in this testing time.¹³²

This is not to say that Zhou or the PLA were willing to actually fight on Pakistan’s behalf. Ayub and Bhutto flew to Beijing on the night of 19 September.

¹³⁰ [NMML] Subject File 44, V. L. Pandit Papers, ‘Note on Sino-Pak and China attitude towards Kashmir’, 22 Oct. 1965.

¹³¹ [TNA] DEFE 44/102, ‘The India-Pakistan War, 1965. Also see: Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, p. 347

¹³² [NMML] Subject File 44, V. L. Pandit Papers, ‘Note on Sino-Pak and China attitude towards Kashmir’, 22 Oct. 1965.

Their aim was to convince both Zhou and Marshal Chen Yi – the Chinese Foreign Minister – to do more to limit Indian mobilisation along the IB with Pakistan. The only guarantee they received, as Zhou made clear, was that China ‘will be maintaining pressure all the time’. As far as fighting was concerned, he suggested that Pakistan ‘must keep fighting even if you have to withdraw to the hills’.¹³³ The Pakistani leaders were shocked. ‘The whole Foreign Office strategy’, recalls the then Pakistani Information Secretary Altaf Gauhar, ‘was designed as a quick-fix to force the Indians to the negotiating table’. Much to Ayub’s surprise, the U.S. and the U.K. failed to come to Pakistan’s aid, and China advocated a ‘people’s war’ that, in practice, Pakistan could not afford.¹³⁴ Back-room negotiations between India and Pakistan in New York commenced in seriousness on the night of 20 September. A day later, China withdrew the ultimatum it had issued to India. Finally, on 23 September, a ceasefire came into effect at 0330 hours, Indian time.¹³⁵

The war had broken Ayub. He had relied on external intervention to limit escalation. This was, as his son later wrote, the primary way in which he thought a general war could be avoided.¹³⁶ The public were furious, too. America’s non-interventionist position led to riots on the streets. Just as the ceasefire agreement was being signed in New York, mobs on the streets of Karachi smashed, and then set ablaze, the United States Information Service Library. They then proceeded to the U.S. Embassy, where they were beaten back.¹³⁷

In turn, the Soviet Union played the role of the chief mediator. This was in stark contrast to the early 1960s, when the U.S. and the U.K. sought to actively broker

¹³³ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 352-353.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 347-355.

¹³⁵ [TNA] DEFE 44/102, ‘The India-Pakistan War, 1965.

¹³⁶ Khan, *Glimpses into the corridors of power*, 98-102.

¹³⁷ Lawrence Ziring, *The Ayub Khan era: Politics in Pakistan, 1958-1969* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 63-65.

a deal on Kashmir between India and Pakistan. On 10 January 1966, an agreement was signed between Ayub and Shastri in Tashkent. Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin served as the go-between, shuttling between Ayub's makeshift office and the one occupied by Shastri. Tragically, it was also in Tashkent that Shastri, as the formal report of the Indian government stated, 'breathed his last' at 1.32 a.m., on 11 January 1966.¹³⁸ As for Ayub, he returned to Pakistan, still as President, but politically weaker than a year earlier. His faith in American and British interventions in South Asia was crushed. During a short visit to London earlier in December 1965, he met with Wilson. Ayub made one last attempt at inviting Britain to mediate a larger agreement on Kashmir. Tellingly, Wilson made it clear that 'the situation had become much too complicated'.¹³⁹ Wilson's tenor and manner was in stark contrast to that in the summer of 1965. At that time, the prime minister had boasted that 'Britain's frontiers' extended till the High Himalayas.¹⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the 1965 War, the British prime minister could not even get himself to hear-out Ayub, adroitly moving the conversation from Kashmir to more abstract issues in world politics. In the end, Britain and America's changing positions, from when the Kutch ceasefire agreement was signed on 30 June 1965 to when Ayub was himself encouraged to authorise Operation Gibraltar and then Grandslam, might not have been the single driving factor that led to a general war. It was however, as this paper has shown, undoubtedly, a central variable that has attracted little attention in the larger body of work on the 1965 conflict.

¹³⁸ [NMML] Subject file No. 18, T. N. Kaul papers, 'Note: Investigation into Shastri's death', undated.

¹³⁹ Note: this is according to Gauhar. See: Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, 366-378.

¹⁴⁰ McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*, 270-271.